

ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION: A Purposeful Understanding of Homework

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DEGREE: Doctor of Education

COLLEGE: Teachers College

DATE: May 2017

PAGES: 141

There has been a long standing debate over the purpose of homework; it has been a topic for educational reform, discussed in educational debates, and looked at as a means to improve student achievement (Foyle & Bailey, 1986; Gill & Schlossman, 2003; Xu, 2005; Fisher & Frey, 2008). Homework can cause frustration for students and parents, which can lead to tension within the home (Gill & Schlossman, 2003). The tension and frustration can be magnified when homework is not assigned at the independent level, when teachers do not consider differences in social classes, and when time is not taken into consideration.

The purpose of this study was to analyze homework within one school district in two different elementary schools. Second and fourth grade classrooms in a Title I and a Non-Title I school were selected. I used an embedded multiple-case study design (Yin, 2014) drawing upon the following data sources: classroom observations, collections of completed homework samples, and interviews with students, teachers, and parents. This study unpacks multiple stakeholders' perceptions and purposes of homework. In addition, effective homework characteristics were researched to help all stakeholders have a common understanding.

Findings that emerged from this study are grouped into several key thematic areas: family support and expectations are viewed differently amongst teachers within and across grade levels

and title/non-title school; the perception of the purpose of homework is varied by role (student, teacher, and family); homework is not differentiated by teachers; and teachers do not provide support to families on how they can assist with homework. Based upon the research conducted from the literature review, several of these findings did not meet effective characteristics of homework. Homework should be differentiated for students (Tomlinson, 2010), designed for independent practice (Vatterott, 2010), an opportunity for student growth (Sallee & Rigler, 2008; Wiggins, 2013), an opportunity for feedback from the teacher (Brookhart, 2012; Hattie, 2012), and time sensitive (Sallee & Rigler, 2008).